COMMENTS CAPTURED DURING BRAINSTORMING MEETING

JUNE 16, 2004

Problems and Challenges

- There are 83 hydrogeologists on staff
    - In R & R (DNR) & PECFA (COMMERCE): staff for leaks & clean ups (gasoline spills); UST for dry cleaners
    - Priorities are out of line for protecting public health. Not a public health threat but law says we must do it. $1.5 billion spent, $350,000/day

- Water Well Association doesn't think private well work should be delegated to Counties. Dane County established a fee to give 75% of costs to owners to appropriately abandon wells. There is concern about legislation that would cut counties out.

- Waukesha -- expense for radium compliance is close to $3 million
- We are depleting aquifer
- Equitableness of fees – fee/service vs. fee/population

- Small & large communities are impacted by increased regulations, etc. Each community is trying to solve problems by themselves and taking on the burden of cost, rather than cooperative & regional approaches.

- Lack of funding sources for communities – they are losing ability to work on systems & infrastructure, e.g. commerce funding for infrastructure.

- History of research funding has been targeted to moderate research for practical projects – that funding is very threatened –
    - Funding sources are DNR, UW, Ag (COMMERCE & DOT)
    - Not too bad yet, but future looks grim.
    - Maybe 20 projects/yr in past; Last year funded only 2 at $30-40,000 each

- Arsenic – mostly in private wells; not municipal, so the problem easily falls through cracks. It is a real health issue. Fewer wells are being tested.

- Federal Drinking Water program expanding with more responsibilities and requirements. There is a need for growth in programs, efforts, revenues. Communities will rely more on state expertise.

- Water utilities want to promote conservation but can't because their budget/income is tied to quantity used by their rate structure and they need $ for infrastructure work

- State budget is getting tougher – more GPR won't be available

- But water is foundation of all . . . Why doesn't public appreciate it?

Strategies to Address Problems and Challenges

1. User Fees

- One way to get attention: put a tax on bottled water of all forms (including beverages that use water)
- Surprised there is not already a tax
- Elected officials will be nervous about additional user fees and where they will end; Also need to address what they will get for user fee; what is the town's benefit
- Legislature is not for implementing fees unless groups affected by it support it.
- In building a home . . . all the fees add up. Adding another makes worse.
- Need to make the case that the DG program shouldn't lose more GPR either with or without fees.
    - Constituency groups make case
    - Need to make it real – health-based
    - Big fear - lose GPR
- What if fees are raised and the DNR cannot hire staff
- How to get more staff?
    - Put them elsewhere – University, County, contract
- What resources are there to take care of rest of program, e.g. research
- Others can help w/training and research
- But DNR/EPA must be regulators.

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- Reallocation of resources
- Reallocate funds/staff from cleanup programs to SDWA programs
- Political will to support public health through safe drinking water
- Educate legislators and state how to better prioritize spending of available dollars
- Improve H_2O system infrastructure
- Increase funding for treatment/infrastructure
- Use of outside contractors for programs
- Let the public have a voice. Do a survey asking if they will pay more?
- Don't ignore 30% of our kids who drink H_2O from private wells
- Targeted training & education for state DW/GW staff
- Stable funding via ?
- Ease restrictions on hiring federally funded staff
- Limit access to water.
- Promote physician/citizen reporting of water-related health problems.
- Bake sales & car washes
- Increase user fees
- User fees for stable resource
- Improve willingness to charge by water utilities
- Cost of service fees as opposed to connection (user) fee
- User fees
- Equitable fee structure based on water use, not connections
- Fees based on direct services received
- Evaluate best rate structure for utilities – conservation vs essential services
- Read my lips . . . NO WATER TAX
- Increase business margins for water utilities
- Direct user fee revenue to:
    - Research
    - Baseline Data Collection
- User fees

2. Partnerships

With Whom

- Health: to look at overall benefits & relative health benefits
- EPA, DNR, industry/utility: Look at new regulations & really evaluating overall benefit
  - How EPA listens to comments?
- Local Officials: education & funding
  Awareness & appreciation
  Great American Shut off
- DG & UW-Extension
  - In working w/public
  - Expand work w/communities, politics
- Research foundations as a funding source
- Civil Eng. Dept @ UW
- Expand partnerships between local & county public health agencies
- Links with wastewater systems & staff
  - e.g. drawdowns due to sewerage discharge
  - their own fees
  - reuse of wastewater for industrial purposes
- Between water utility & local govt decision makers there is a partnership & communication breakdown

Doing What

- Training
- Baseline data collection (monitoring)
  - Used to do more of this
  - Less interest in this as less exciting
- Integrate DNR engineering needs into Univ curriculum so students have needed qualifications.

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- Encourage Partnership w/ local health depts
- Research partnerships
- Strengthen partnerships w/ local Gov, Org.'s, & other agencies
- Coordinate activities better w/ other state agencies

3. Gain Public Support/Awareness

Be aware that some cannot legally lobby

Volunteers: Joe Janczy, Marilyn Wass, Nancy Quirk
Purpose – to get stable funding source
Some Targets: public water systems, utilities

Different messages/things to share with public to increase their awareness

- Action needed to get/maintain/promote Groundwater/Drinking water DNR programs
- Recognize importance of drinking water
- Awareness of what used to be true, what's at risk.
- Awareness of how fees would be allocated and used
- Explain what GPR is used for
- Where our water comes from
- Why our water is safe: WI. has something special . . . compare with elsewhere.

Thoughts

- People open to a charge if think they are getting benefit
- Industrial vs. residential applications are different

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- Public Support
- Education
- Educate public about cost of ensuring safe drinking water
- Communicate to public & Legislators what program can no longer do as funds are cut
- Build grass roots support
- Increase public awareness of value of safe drinking water for state as a whole
- Educate political and industrial leaders on true value of water to state's economy.
- EDUCATE THE PUBLIC!
- GAIN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM

4. Regional Coordination

DNR acts as conveyor or catalyst for mutual problem-solving

Volunteer: Nancy Quirk

Thoughts:

- There is no correlation on fees from locale to locale
- Potential for large cost savings
- Local gov'ts need to be involved . . .cities as well as town
- Realize that politics can get in the way, eg annexation issues
  - Political barriers
  - Turf issue
  - Tax issues
- Goes back to public support and awareness of problems, solutions, feedback; if they are educated, they may work regionally more readily

Doing What:

- Start w/DNR coordinating on an issue like arsenic area
  - private/public all facing same issues
- Have fewer water systems; we have too many systems.
- Financial incentives – pay $ in grants for comprehensive planning as an example
- DNR & PSC work on Capacity development
- Provide Good examples that work; start w/easier things

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- Devolve some activities to move counties – provide fee
- Provide localities with funding incentives for regionalized approach to water utilities
- Promote regionalized utilities (where feasible)
- Regional planning with more teeth
- Create funding incentives for regional solutions
- Regional coordinated drinking water problem/solution identification headed by a state agency (including public & private issues)